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## About arowanas

The common name "arowana" is used to refer to any one of seven species of an ancient order of fish called the "bony tongues" (suborder *Osteoglossoidei*). They are so named because of the bony plates found on the floor of their mouths. The plate is pressed against the teeth in the roof of the mouth when the fish captures and processes food.

These prehistoric-looking fish are found in South America, Africa, Asia, and Australia. The *Arapaima gigas*, one of the world's largest freshwater fish, also belongs to this group. This huge predatory fish lives in the Amazon and can grow up to four-and-a-half metres long.

The most common species kept in aquariums around the world is the

*Osteoglossum bicirrhosum* (South American arowana), whilst the most impressive is the *Scleropages formosus* (Asian arowana or dragon fish). According to Chinese mythology, the dragon fish can bring good luck and business success to its owner, as well as ward off evil.

Both these species have large barbels on their bottom lips to help detect prey wriggling at the surface. Another interesting fact about these fish is that they brood their eggs and young in their mouths to prevent their being eaten by predators.

The fry are released to fend for themselves when they have grown to a reasonable size. Mouthbrooding is practised by male *O. bicirrhosum* and female dragon fish.

## Keeping arowanas

Both *O. bicirrhosum* and dragon fish are large and active, and therefore need to be kept in bigger-sized aquariums. The *O. bicirrhosum* may grow up to over a metre in length while the dragon fish normally grows up to approximately 90cm. Thus, the minimum length of an aquarium for adult fish should be at least 150cm long.

Maintaining good water quality is important, so it is essential to have a powerful filter. Reasonably strong water currents and good aeration are also conditions favourable for *O. bicirrhosum*.

The dragon fish also needs good filtration, but the amount of water movement created by the filter and airstone must not be too great.

Because these fish are active and good jumpers (the *O. bicirrhosum* can leap up to two metres to catch terrestrial insects), the aquarium needs to be secured with a tight-fitting cover.

Due to their nervous disposition, it would also be good to house the aquarium in a quiet area, out of direct sunlight, and provide some floating

plants for the fish to take refuge in.

It's also best not to keep other fish in the same tank. However, arowana hobbyists often keep a large plecostomus - a species of fish that feeds on algae and in doing so, helps to check growth of algae on the glass walls of the tank. These fish usually remain on the base and sides of the tank, and are generally very peaceful. However, they need to be watched, as they could develop a taste for the mucus found on the sides of larger fish. However, this is rarely the case.

Learn how to buy arowana and care for them in next Saturday's issue of *My Aquarium*.



This article is contributed by Rupert Bridges of Tetra Information Centre.

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